

## II: IR THEORY OUTSIDE THE WEST

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# Toward a Post-Western IR: The *Umma*, *Khalsa Panth*, and Critical International Relations Theory<sup>1</sup>

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This article explores the possibilities of the emergence of a genuinely “post-Western,” and less Eurocentric, “critical” international relations (IR) theory through a brief examination of “critical” discourses within two “non-western” cosmopolitan traditions: Islam and Sikhism. It is argued that, although critical IR has created space for the articulation of post-western discourses within the discipline, it continues to speak *for* and *to* the West. A genuinely “post-western” critical IR would seek to go beyond mere *mimicry* of the “derivative discourses” of the modern West by identifying critical discourses on the political from *within* non-western traditions. First, “Islamist” discourses on the *Umma* which are simultaneously critical of the varying forms of “Kemalism” and “neo-fundamentalism” prevalent in the Islamic world will be briefly examined. Second, critical perspectives on Sikhism which critique the derivative “politics of homeland” and re-assert the sovereignty of the deterritorialized, transnational community of believers, the *Khalsa Panth*, will be considered. It is argued that, like the Muslim *Umma*, the *Khalsa Panth*, offers us an alternative conception of universality—and a potentially more “solidarist” conception of international society—than that offered by western Westphalian IR. The inclusion of Islamic and Sikh discourses in the “House of IR” [Aganthele and Ling, *International Studies Review* 6 (2004b), 21] will therefore contribute to the creation of a more diverse, less hegemonic, discipline.

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In a recent edition of *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan pose the rhetorical question: why is there no non-Western international relations theory (IRT)? They argue that almost all IRT “is produced by and for the West, and rests on an assumption that western history is world history.” They conclude that “if we are to improve IRT as a whole, then the Western IRT needs to be challenged not just from within, but also from outside the West” (Acharya and Buzan 2007a:289). This article is based on the premise

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that critical International Relations (critical IR) theory, by examining the origins, development, and potential transformation of the bounded territorial state, has created space *within* the discipline for the articulation of challenges from *outside* the West.<sup>2</sup> However, the secular Eurocentric historicism deployed by most critical theorists places limits on the degree to which transnational non-western actors can fully participate in “critical” international politics (Shani 2007a).

A genuinely “post-western” critical international theory would interrogate not only the positivist methodology of IR but also the concomitant assumptions of western cultural distinctiveness and superiority which are constitutive of the discipline (Krishna 1993; Tickner 2003; Pasha 2005; Hobson 2007; Hutchings 2007; Shani 2007a). Most attempts to do so from a “postcolonial” perspective,<sup>3</sup> however, have ended up reproducing the very hegemony they set out to critique.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that postcolonialism is incapable of challenging the Eurocentric premises of western IR since it is framed within cultural discourses emanating from the West (Acharya and Buzan 2007a:307). This begs the question as to whether it is indeed possible to “move beyond the West” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004). After five centuries of European imperialism, Western thought is now, as Chakrabarty concludes, “a gift to us all” (Chakrabarty 2000:255); its “thick” values have long since become the “thin” values of “international society.” For, as Bull and Watson (1984:433) noted a quarter of a century ago, “the most striking feature of...global international society...is the extent to which the states of Asia and Africa have embraced such basic elements of European international society as the sovereign state, the rules of international law, the procedures and conventions of diplomacy and IR.”

Such a reading of world history serves to reproduce the Eurocentric underpinnings and reinforce the hegemony of the West within IR, silencing subaltern and non-western voices. Non-western peoples did not “embrace the basic elements of European international society” out of their own volition but were forced to do so. The sovereign states-system was itself a legacy of colonialism: a rejection of European principles, norms and values would have led to the permanent exclusion of the colonized world from “international society.” *Contra* Buzan and Acharya, it is argued that the ontological premises of western IRT need to be *rethought* not merely “enriched by the addition of new voices” from the global South (Acharya and Buzan 2007b:427–428). Their reduction of Asian non-western IR to the level of the “pre-theoretical,” and their seemingly uncritical acceptance of the territorialized nation-state as the basic unit of any IRT, reinforces the Orientalism (Said 1978) and “provincialism” of Western IR. If, as they claim, “Western IRT has not only built the stage and written the play, but also defined and institutionalized the *audience* for IR and IRT” (Acharya and Buzan 2007b:436; -emphasis mine), then it is no wonder that non-western approaches to IR are seen as mere “mimicry” (Bhabha 1994; Bilgin 2008) of western discourses or as “local variations” of western ideas which have acquired “theoretical” status in the academy.

Instead, it is argued here that a “new method of analysis” in IR is needed which would allow voices marginalized from both the “practical” and

<sup>2</sup>See the Special Issue of *Review of International Studies* 33 (April) for a critical appraisal of the impact of Critical Theory on IR.

<sup>3</sup>Prominent examples of postcolonial approaches to IR include Darby and Paolini (1994); Darby (1997, 2004); Paolini (1999); Doty (1996); Chowdry and Nair (2002); and Ling (2002). The latter “reads” postcolonial studies “through the analytical lens of gender” (Ling 2007:141). For an accessible, concise introduction to postcolonial IR see Grovogui (2007).

<sup>4</sup>Most postcolonial writers follow Chakrabarty (2000:22) in acknowledging “the indispensability of European political thought to representations of non-European political modernity.” This has led some critics to raise concerns that postcolonial discourse is “largely inaccessible to individuals who lack academic training in the core” (Tickner 2003:314).

“theoretical” mainstream to be heard in the “house of IR” (Aganthelelou and Ling 2004a,b). This does not entail a complete rejection of western IR since to do so would be an impossibility given our shared colonial heritage. Indeed, as Inayatullah and Blaney (2004:16) perceptively point out, moving “beyond the West” entails not its rejection but its “rediscovery and reimagination.” For Naoki Sakai, the contemporary “West” no longer refers to a particular geographically and territorially defined culture; there is “*no single quality which is adequate to define the identity of the West*” (Sakai 2005:189;—emphasis in the original). Rather, the “West” should be seen as a “putative unity”: a social imaginary that works as a myth on a global scale and which cannot be dissociated from colonial modernity (Sakai 2005).

However, *critical* discourses on the “international” and “political” which do not seek to merely “mimic” the discourses of colonial modernity exist outside of the (geographically and territorially defined) “West.” These can be identified not only by looking *outside* the discipline, in the spirit of the pioneers of critical IR (Ashley 1981; Cox 1981, 1986; Linklater 1990, 1998), but also outside the social sciences and entering the world of the lived, embodied experiences and ritualized, cultural practices which constitute “indigenous” (that is non-western) cosmopolitan traditions.

Acharya and Buzan (2007a:309) ask if there are “indigenous political or strategic traditions, beliefs, and practices that may have no equivalent in the western IRT, but which did and may continue to influence local political beliefs and practices relevant to IR.” This article will examine two such traditions in an attempt to further “provincialize” (Chakrabarty 2000) Western IR. First, “Islamist” discourses (Sayyid 1997) which are simultaneously critical of the varying forms of “Kemalism”<sup>5</sup> (Sayyid 1997:63–69) deployed by postcolonial state elites and the “neo-fundamentalism” (Roy 2004) of the so-called *Salafists* or in Islamic cultural zones (Pasha 2005) will be examined. It is argued that these discourses are more self-consciously *reflexive* than either Kemalism or neo-fundamentalism, which can be seen as “derivative” of Western modernity. This is not, however, to say that they are more *authentic* since any claims to authenticity will inevitably be contested in a decentralized, global community of one billion and are, furthermore, impossible to make given the intrinsic *hybridity* of culture (Bhabha 1994). Indeed, to speak of an authentic Islamic culture would be to accept both the Orientalist and *salafist* premise that Islam is a homogenous, self-contained “civilization” with its own God-given laws which deny human agency.

This depiction of Islam as the Other which makes possible the construction of the modern, rational western Self does, however, have important ramifications for the articulation of other non-western “religious” traditions. Islam’s role as the “hegemonic Other” against which the contemporary West defines itself has simultaneously enabled, yet occluded from the Western gaze, the articulation of other non-western cosmopolitanisms. Like the Muslim *Umma*, the Sikh transnational community of believers, the *Khalsa Panth*, offers us an alternative conception of universality—and a more “solidarist” conception of international society—than that offered by western Westphalian IR. The colonial encounter, however, *territorialized* Sikh identity laying the foundations for a derivative “politics of homeland” (Tatla 1999) in the late twentieth century. Although Sikh identity remains constrained within a “Westphalian straightjacket” (Buzan and

<sup>5</sup>Kemalism refers to the “nationalist” movements within the Islamic world which followed the abolition of the Caliphate. These can be seen as “derivative discourses” in a double sense; first, they were “derivative” of the movement led by Mustapha Kemal thus underlining the continued centrality of Turkey to the contemporary Muslim world; and, second, they were “derivative” of the modern West since they reproduced the logic of colonial modernity outlined by Chatterjee (1986).

Little 2001), globalization has lessened the importance of territory to Sikh identity, creating space for the re-assertion of the sovereignty of the *Khalsa Panth*.

### De-Historicizing Critical International Theory

A quarter of a century ago, the discipline of IR remained anchored—to a far greater extent than today—in realist premises. Three premises in particular continued (and arguably still continue) to set the research agenda for IR. First, conventional theories of IR unquestionably accepted the state's claim to legitimacy and sovereignty. Second, they followed neorealism in regarding a strict separation of domestic (intra-state) and international (inter-state) relations to be possible. Finally, the international system was assumed to be *anarchic*. The absence of a common power affords IR a structure which helps explain the persistence not only of separate territorially bounded units of international political activity but also conflict between these units. This structure was considered “immutable,” having endured since either the Peace of Westphalia or the days of the Peloponnesian War (Waltz 1979, 1986, 1990).

Critical international theory, in both its Gramscian and “Frankfurt School” guises,<sup>6</sup> challenged the positivist assumptions of neorealism questioning its claims to objectivity. Theory, as Robert Cox (1981:128, 1986:207) argued in his seminal *Millennium* article is always for *someone* and for some *purpose*. All theories, he claimed, have a perspective which are situated in a particular time and space and cannot be divorced from it. Although a Gramscian, Cox deployed the terminology of the Frankfurt school in distinguishing between “traditional” and “critical theory.” While “the former...takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized as the given framework for action,” the latter is concerned with the possibilities for liberation that are *immanent* within existing political and social relations (Cox 1981:128). Cox famously stigmatized neorealism as a form of “problem-solving theory” employed by “hegemonic social forces” to “smooth the functioning” of the system (Cox 1986:209). Critical theory, on the other hand, “allows for a normative choice in favor of a social and political order different from the prevailing order, but it limits the range of choice to alternative orders which are feasible transformations of the existing world” (Cox 1986:210). Cox's intervention simultaneously created space within IR for the application of Gramscian ideas to the study of the international political economy (IPE),<sup>7</sup> and the development of a critical international theory which was welcomed by some as the “next stage” of IR theory (Hoffmann 1987).

As Rengger and Thirkell-White (2007:8) point out, obvious parallels exist between Cox's neo-Gramscian framework and the Frankfurt School inspired critical international theory of Andrew Linklater in particular. However, whereas Cox took his inspiration from Gramsci and early Frankfurt School theorists such as Horkheimer, Linklater has helped introduce Habermasian “discourse ethics” to IR where they have been influential in the development of constructivist, post-structuralist and feminist perspectives (Diez and Steans 2005). For Linklater, discourse ethics contributes to the modern “civilizing process.” Norbert Elias had earlier defined the civilizing process as involving the solution to the problem of how persons can satisfy basic needs without “destroying, frustrating, demeaning or in other ways harming each other time and time again in their search for this

<sup>6</sup>For a comprehensive survey of critical international theory, and in particular the tension between its “Gramscian” and “Habermasian” schools, see Wyn Jones (2001).

<sup>7</sup>In the emerging field of IPE, Stephen Gill (1993) in particular has elaborated on Cox's use of Gramsci to counter the ahistorical (and deeply conservative) appropriation of Gramscian ideas by structural realists (see Krasner, 1985; Gilpin 2001).

satisfaction” (Linklater 2005:141). The application of discourse ethics to IRs translates into equal rights to participate in a dialog to determine the principles of inclusion and exclusion which govern global politics (Linklater 1998:107).

Although Linklater has recently moved away from the “excessive rationalism” of the Habermasian project of reconstructing historical materialism, defending a “thin version” of discourse ethics (Linklater 2005:154), his earlier work—like that of most critical theorists—bears the imprint of Eurocentric historicism. Historicism may be defined as a mode of thinking which, in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words, “tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first as an individual and unique whole—as some kind of unity in potential—and, second, as something that develops over time” (Chakrabarty 2000:22–23). The problem with historicism, in Chakrabarty’s view, is that it assumes the existence of a singular, universalizing narrative of modernity (which he termed “History 1”) and cannot countenance the existence of alternative modes of temporality (History 2s), each with its own concept of the political. The denial of what Chakrabarty terms “heterotemporality” renders postcolonial peoples “people without history” (Wolf 1982) and helps legitimize the “civilizing mission” of colonialism by translating historical *time* into cultural *distance*. “Civilization” is measured in terms of the time in which it takes a (non-Western) society to be (forcibly) brought into what Benjamin termed the secular, empty, and homogenous time of history (as “History 1”).

In *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (1990), Linklater employs a historicist framework borrowed from Hegel, Marx, and Habermas in differentiating between three stages of human development (or “History 1” to use Chakrabarty’s terminology) leading to the establishment of “a global legal and political system which affords protection to all human subjects as equals,” thus realizing the Kantian vision of a “universal kingdom of ends” (Linklater 1990:199). This temporal analysis is then applied *spatially* in such a way as to reproduce existing geopolitical inequalities. In his seminal *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998), Linklater divides the world order into three spheres: a pluralist society of states where states do not share common interests or values; a “solidarist” society of states where states share common moral principles and values; and finally, an embryonic post-Westphalian community centered on Europe where societies “establish closer forms of political cooperation to integrate shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life” (Linklater 1998:166–167). It is easy to see why Linklater’s *transformation* appears to others as a “hierarchicalization” (Walker 1999:155–156) of political community for in his attempt to transcend the particularism of the nation-state, Linklater appears to reinforce the old Orientalist divide between a “civilized,” developed and rational Europe on the one hand, and those (non-European) societies incapable of integrating “shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life” on the other.

Nor, as both Hobson (2007) and Pasha (2005) have shown can neo-Gramscian critical IR escape the charge of “Eurocentrism” (Amin 1989) or “Orientalism” (Said 1978). Indeed, neo-Gramscianism is perhaps more consistent in its use of a historicist framework centered on the West. No doubt, this reflects its Marxist legacy: neo-Gramscians seem unwilling (or unable) to shed their modernist clothing. Both Hobson and Pasha echo Linklater’s use of “thick” and “thin” in distinguishing between values (Linklater 1998) and, more recently, discourse ethics (Linklater 2005) by differentiating between “conscious” and “subliminal” Eurocentrism (Hobson 2007) and “hard” and “soft” Orientalism (Pasha 2005). For Hobson, “subliminal” Eurocentrism is, unlike “conscious” Eurocentrism, highly critical of the West. However, it is no less Eurocentric since it assumes that the West continues to lie at the center of all things in the world and considers



its development to be self-generating. The West is seen to be in a position to continually reshape the world in its own image. This “*Westphillian*” straightjacket makes “racist hierarchy and racism invisible in the world while simultaneously issuing racist Eurocentric explanatory models of the world” (Hobson 2007:93). Pasha, while adopting a Gramscian framework, is similarly critical of the neo-Gramscian inability to adequately come to terms with cultural difference. Neo-Gramscians are seen as reproducing, perhaps unintentionally, assumptions of either “Liberal neutrality” or “cultural thickness” which collectively produce a variant which Pasha likens to “soft Orientalism.” In the first place, cultural difference is elided by a discourse which privileges the establishment of a western global hegemony. In the second instance, cultural “otherness” becomes the principal source of “counter-hegemonic movements or resistance to a globalizing economy and its homogenizing cultural accoutrements” (Pasha 2005:544).

Pasha’s exhortation to critically rethink the limits of *Western* IR prompts us to try to identify critical discourses within non-western traditions. In doing so, one must guard, on the one hand, against the temptation to deploy a *nativist* discourse which posits an essentialized, homogeneous and ahistorical (non-western) culture standing firm against assimilation into (Western) global modernity. Sensitivity needs to be shown to differences *within* as well as *between* cultures and any claims to cultural *authenticity* must be treated with considerable skepticism given the internal *heterogeneity* of culture, the *constructed* nature of cultural boundaries and the *transformative*, traumatic and often tragic impact of the colonial encounter.

However, to reduce all politicized expressions of cultural difference to “derivative discourses” of Western modernity runs the risk—apparent in most postcolonial scholarship—of reducing the Orient to silence.<sup>8</sup> As Peter van der Veer (1994:21) has pointed out in his discussion of religious nationalism in India, this is in itself an “Orientalist fallacy” that denies “Orientals” agency in constructing their society and simplifies the intricate interplay of western and non-western discourses. Most critical theorists<sup>9</sup> reproduce this “Orientalist fallacy” by failing to acknowledge that *other* (non-western) “universalistic communities” (Elshtain 1999) may have, to use Linklater’s words, already integrated “shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life.” In the sections that follow, this article will examine two such “universalistic communities”: the *Umma* and *Khalsa Panth*. It will be argued that both have been able to integrate “shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life” and consequently form embryonic “post-Westphalian” communities.

### The *Umma* as a Post-Westphalian Community

In the non-western world, the most sustained challenge to the secular, historicist, and Eurocentric worldview of Western IR has come from “Islamism.” Indeed, particularly since 9/11, Islam has come to be viewed as a “hegemonic Other,” a distinct, self-contained and largely homogenous “civilization” characterized by cultural *thickness* (Huntington 1996), which allows the construction of a rational, pluralistic, and secular, “Liberal” western self (Said 1978). However, Islamism is neither uniform nor homogenous. Primarily, a *political* rather than a religious discourse, Islamism is “a debate about modernity, expressed in multiple voices,

<sup>8</sup>In *Orientalism* (1978), Said claimed that Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that “the Orientalist poet or scholar, *makes the Orient speak*, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West” (Said 1978:21—emphasis mine). The implication is that the indigenous voice of the “oriental subject” is silenced by the power of Orientalism.

<sup>9</sup>Hutchings (2001, 2005, 2007) is a notable exceptions. Furthermore, Cox’s more recent work on “civilizations and forms of political economy” (Cox 2001:52–55) goes some way toward countering the charges of Eurocentrism leveled in the article.

encompassing varied and conflicting theoretical positions that are meant to have practical, political effects” (Buck-Morss 2003:43).

Esposito and Voll (2000) have isolated two distinct “visions” associated with Islamism: a “conflict” and “dialogue.” The “conflict” vision of Islam refers to the ideology of those militant groups—some of which are affiliated to *al-Qaeda*—who espouse an ideology of *salafism*: a school of thought which advocates a return to the traditions of the *salafs* (devout ancestors) and looks back on the first three generations of Muslims (the *Sahabah*, *Tabi ‘n* and the *Taba ‘at-Tabi ‘in*) as an Islamic “golden age,” uncorrupted by the materialism and individualism of modern, westernized Islamic societies (Kepel 2004:219–222). Although its origins can be traced to the community founded by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, modern *salafism* emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century as an Islamic response to European colonialism and was influenced by the work of reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and Muhammed Abduh (1849–1905). However, it only developed as a coherent political ideology and movement in the mid-twentieth century as a result of the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood and the *Jama‘at-i-Islami* (Islamic Association), and the theoretical interventions of Abdul A‘la Mawdudi (1903–1979) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) in particular.

Contemporary *salafism* has been characterized as a form of “neo-fundamentalism” (Roy 2004): a derivative discourse of western modernity. For Roy (2004:232), neo-fundamentalists reject the idea that there can be different schools of thought and consider themselves the only true Muslims. They advocate a strict and literalist reading of the *Qu‘ran and Sunnah*, stress the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*), oppose innovation (*bid‘a*), associationism (*shirk*) and “blind imitation” (*taqlid*) (Roy 2004:243). The neo-fundamentalist project is *apolitical* and often nihilistic: what is sought is salvation which can be achieved not through political activity but through the purification of Islam from all “foreign” influences (including those from Islamic societies themselves). Roy, however, comes dangerously close to regarding *all* Islamic political discourses as derivative of modern, Western narratives. If Islamism or “political Islam” is seen to have “failed,” then what is left for the one billion inhabitants of Islamic Cultural Zones (Pasha 2005) apart from adopting *other* discourses derivative of the West?

It is argued that the “dialogue” vision, best represented by Islamic theorists resident in the West, provides us with a variant of “critical Islam” (Mandaville 2001), which mirrors but does not necessarily reflect the tension between “traditional” and “critical” theory in western social science (Shani 2007a). However, the distinction between “conflict” and “dialogue” visions is itself Eurocentric as it attempts to distinguish between different strands of political Islam *on the basis of* their receptivity to a dialog with the West constructed on *Western* terms.<sup>10</sup> A post-Western approach would be to differentiate between different schools of political Islam on the basis of the extent to which they allow for the exercise of *ijtihad*: an Islamic legal concept variously translated as “independent reasoning” (Esposito 2003:134) or “reasoned struggle and rethinking” (Sardar 2003:27).

For Ziauddin Sardar, Islam has degenerated from “being a liberating force, a kinetic social, cultural and intellectual dynamic for equality, justice and humane values” as a result of the “closure of the gates of *ijtihad*.” The “freezing of interpretation” has led to three developments in particular which Sardar sees as “metaphysical catastrophes”: the elevation of the *Shari‘ah* to the level of the divine, the concomitant loss of agency from believers, and the equation of Islam with the state (Sardar 2003:27–28). Echoing the terminology of critical theory, Sardar (2003:64–80) sees the *Shari‘ah* as a “problem-solving methodology.” The

<sup>10</sup>See Dallymayr (2002) for a hermeneutical perspective on “civilizational dialogue” from a (self-avowed) *Western* perspective.

application of the *Shari'ah* to Islamic societies is not only “ahistorical” but robs Muslims of agency; Islam becomes a “state-based political ideology” instead of an “integrative worldview.” The *Umma* is, consequently, “reduced to the ideals of a nation-state” (Sardar 2003:28–31).

The *Umma* is, however, emphatically, *not* a nation-state: rather it is an association of Islamic societies which share the same “thick” values and seek to integrate them into the social and political life. For Sayyid, the idea of the *Umma* rejects the “limits” of the nation, defined in terms of language, ethnicity, race and citizenship, and constantly reiterates the universality of Islam (Sayyid 2000:36). Following Sayyid, the globalized *Umma* may be seen as a paradigmatic example of an embryonic “post-Westphalian” community. What *salafis* and advocates of dialog with other “civilizations” (or indeed all Muslims) have in common is a “fundamental attachment...not to the *watan* (homeland) but to the *Umma*, or community of believers, all made equal in their submission to Allah” (Castells 1997:15). The relationship between *Umma* and *watan* offers us an alternative re-articulation of the relationship between the claims of universality and particularity to that offered by the Westphalian state-system and a “thicker” or more *solidarist* conception of international society than that favored by Western IR theorists.<sup>11</sup>

### In the Shadow of the *Umma*: The *Khalsa* Panth

The *Umma*, however, is not the only example of a transnational religious community which has sought to “establish closer forms of political cooperation to integrate shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life” (Linklater 1998:166–167). Half a century after the Peace of Westphalia, an “event” took place which, like the Peace of Westphalia itself, has become a “foundational myth.” However, while the “myth of 1648” (Teschke 2003) continues to define the epistemology and ontology of modern, *Western* IR, the impact of the events of 1699 have, until very recently, been confined to the Punjab region of India. At Anandpur Sahib on *Vaisakhi* day (the Sikh Spring festival), Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and last Guru of the Sikh *panth*, or “religious community,” initiated five volunteers, the *panj piare* (beloved or cherished five), into the new order of the “*Khalsa*.” The term *Khalsa*, derived from the Arabic *khalis*, literally means “pure” but implies spiritual purity. In the *Qu'ran*, Allah is referred to as *Ikhalis*, the “purifier” and the term *khalsa* similarly had religious significance for the followers of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of the Sikh *panth*.<sup>12</sup>

By instituting the *Khalsa*, and then undergoing the initiation rite—the *khande ki pahul*—himself, Guru Gobind acknowledged the *sovereignty* of the “*Khalsa Panth*” and submitted himself to its collective will. The spiritual (*miri*) and temporal (*piri*) dimensions of the Guru’s authority were, under the doctrine of *Guru-Panth*, invested in the *Khalsa Panth* through the *khande ki pahul*. Thereafter, the *Khalsa* was to be held responsible for both the protection and administration of the community. From its very inception, it was envisaged as “a society for

<sup>11</sup>Hedley Bull (1977) famously distinguished between “pluralist” and “solidarist” conceptions of international society. A pluralist international society places emphasis on the maintenance of order in a state-system whereas a solidarist international society is characterized by the existence of common values, rules and institutions which may legitimize international intervention. See Buzan (2004:45–62) for an insightful analysis of the pluralist-solidarist debate.

<sup>12</sup>Nanak had earlier developed a religious and social philosophy which, although deeply influenced by both Hinduism and Islam, was distinct from both. For Nanak, there was “only one Lord, and only one tradition,” which encompassed both Hinduism and Islam but which could not be reduced to either. The Sikh concept of God, *Vahiguru*, is as the omnipotent and omnipresent transcendent creator and sovereign of the universe who lies beyond human understanding and, in contrast to Islam and Christianity, does not take human form (Shani 2007b:21).



salvation and self-realisation, unitarian in religion, vernacularist in culture and democratic in politics" (Uberoi 1996:74). It was unitarian in its insistence, following Nanak, on the indivisibility of *Vahiguru*; it was vernacularist in its use of a vernacular language, Punjabi written in *Gurmukhi* script, to record *Vahiguru's* message as communicated by the Gurus (*gurbani*); and it was democratic in its assertion of sovereignty over the temporal and spiritual domains. The *Khalsa*, in short, was not merely conceived as a spiritual fraternity of orthodox Sikhs, but as a sovereign, *political* community which could defend itself and would no longer need the tutelage of a human Guru. The *Khalsa Panth* can be viewed as a "post-Westphalian" community in its assertion of the sovereignty of the transnational religio-political community. Sovereignty is not only *de-territorialized* but *embodied* in the external symbols of the Sikh "faith." Furthermore, the radical egalitarianism (which extended to gender relations<sup>13</sup>) of the Gurus' message has many affinities with the normative content of critical theorists since both share an interest in emancipation from all unnecessary constraints on human freedom.

How can one then explain the very *absence* of a discussion of the *Khalsa Panth* in critical IR literature? Part of the reason must lie in the legacy of the colonial encounter which still continues to influence hegemonic narratives of both IR (Darby 1997, 2004; Blaney and Inayatullah 2004) and Sikh identity (Oberoi 1994; Dusenberry 1999; Axel 2001; Shani 2005, 2007b). The colonial encounter divided the *Khalsa Panth* into twin narratives of "world religion" and "nation" (Dusenberry 1999; Shani 2007a,b). The first narrative identifies the Sikhs as followers of a monotheistic, universal world religion centered on the reading of a holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, written in a sacred script particular to the Sikhs (*gurmukhi*), in a Sikh place of worship (*gurdwara*). Membership of the Sikh "religion" is open to anyone who follows the established practice of the *Khalsa Rahit* (code of conduct). The second narrative identifies the Sikhs as a "nation" with definite physical boundaries, namely, those of the Indian state of Punjab. Sikhs share a common language (Punjabi), an association with a homeland (the Punjab) and their own political system comprising of a Sikh "parliament," the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee* (SGPC), and a "Sikh" political party, the *Shiromani Akali Dal*. In this narrative, the establishment of the *Khalsa* becomes a "foundational myth" of the Sikh "nation." This narrative has, especially since Operation Bluestar<sup>14</sup> in 1984, given rise to a "derivative discourse" (Chatterjee 1986) of Sikh nationalism which sought the establishment of an independent, Sikh homeland: *Khalistan* (Tatla 1999; Deol 2000; Singh 2000; Axel 2001; Shani 2007b).

The crushing of the separatist movement by the Indian state between 1984 and 1992 (Pettigrew 1995; Singh 2000) and the transition to what Mandaville (2001) terms "translocality" as a result of the intensification of the processes associated with globalization (Scholte 2005; Held and McGrew 2006) has led to a rethinking of Sikh identity. Although the nationalist narrative remains strong, particularly in the "diaspora"<sup>15</sup> (Tatla 1999; Axel 2001), space has been created for the articulation of a "counter-hegemonic" narrative which potentially challenges the Westphalian international order by rejecting sovereign statehood and

<sup>13</sup>See Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2005) for a rereading of the establishment of the Khalsa from a (Sikh) feminist perspective.

<sup>14</sup>"Operation Bluestar" was the codename given to the Indian state's storming of the Golden Temple Complex under Indira Gandhi in 1984. The Golden Temple complex in Amritsar houses both *Harimandir Sahib*, the holiest shrine in Sikhism, and the *Akal Takht* where the SGPC, the Sikh parliament is housed. The attack, which claimed the lives not only of Sikh militants but also of thousands of innocent pilgrims, was widely interpreted by many Sikhs in the Punjab and the diaspora as "an act of genocide" (Tatla 1999:28).

<sup>15</sup>More than one million Sikhs out of a total population of twenty million live outside the Punjab, mainly in North America and the United Kingdom (Shani 2007b:80–81).

re-asserting the sovereignty of the *transnational* community, the *Khalsa Panth* (Shani 2005, 2007a,b).

### Conclusion: Dialog, Difference, and the Limits of Western Critical IR

Values are relative concepts which, as Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006:44–47) reminds us, are contested *within* as well as *between* societies. If critical theorists are serious about encouraging “discourse ethics,” or moral conversation about values, across societies, they must be prepared to accept disagreements. One of the problems with the application of Habermasian “discourse ethics” to IR is that, by distinguishing between “thick” and “thin” values, Linklater and other critical theorists make it more difficult to disagree. Discourse ethics presupposes that a mutual, inter-subjective understanding can be achieved and this, *contra* Linklater, may be viewed as a “fixed and final vision of the future.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, those with a “fixed and final vision of the future” *which differs from that of critical theorists* may be unable to participate in dialog since to do so would be to comprise that vision.

In common with many critical theorists, Tariq Ramadan (2004:5) suggests that Muslims in the West should “enter into an authentic dialog, as between equals, with all our fellow citizens with respect for the identical universality of our respective values, willingly open to mutual enrichment and eventually to becoming true partners in action.” However, participation in a dialogic community does not imply that Muslims should *relativize* “the universal principles of Islam” in the name of integration. Indeed, for Ramadan (2004:5–6) and many other Muslims, “it is in the very name of the universality that... my conscience is summoned to respect diversity and the relative.” Similarly, respect for diversity is a *universal* value for Sikhs: *Vahiguru* is “One” but “countless are his shapes and forms” (Namdeva, Raga Asa, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*; cited in Shani 2007b:xii). In other words, Sikhs and Muslims are prepared to participate in a dialogic community only if their claim to a “thick” universality which respects difference is accepted.

A “Post-western” Critical IR would, therefore, need to reconsider the basis upon which a potential “dialogue between civilizations” can take place in order for it to be *inclusive* of cultural difference. As this article has attempted to show, the “thin” cosmopolitanism of critical IR remains embedded within a “thick” secular, rationalist historicist methodology. Critical IR theory, to paraphrase Cox, continues to speak *for* and *to* the West even though, unlike conventional “problem-solving” IR theory, it seeks to “emancipate” the (passive) non-West from its domination. If Critical IR theorists are serious “about building a more inclusive discipline” (Tickner 2003:323) and if IR is to evolve into an important site of “heterology” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004:17), then an engagement with the “thicker” cultures of the non-West is necessary. This article has attempted to steer the conversation in this direction by examining two non-Western “post-Westphalian” communities which share similar values to those espoused by critical theorists and which have sought to integrate these “shared values into their social and political life.”

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<sup>16</sup>Connolly (2001) makes a similar point in his response to Dallmayr’s use of Habermas’ communicative rationality. He argues in favor of an “ethos of pluralization” in which conversations take place without necessarily aiming at a common understanding.

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